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Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS

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## UNAIDS
## Theme Group Assessment 2000

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# I    INTRODUCTION

The UN Theme Group remains the main instrument of UN coordination on HIV/AIDS at the country level. It is the expression of UNAIDS at country level and the primary channel and vehicle for the Secretariat's and the UN system's collective support to, and collaboration with, countries.  Its importance and relevance to the overall response to HIV/AIDS in countries - through ensuring a cohesive and strategic UN system response - are increasingly recognized, both by the UN's national and international partners and, importantly, by UNAIDS Cosponsors and other UN system agencies themselves.  Indeed, UN Theme Groups on HIV/AIDS are singled out in several of last year's UN Resident Coordinator Reports as the most consistently active of all Theme Groups set up by the UN Country Teams.

Since the early assessments of Theme Groups in 1996, there has been a significant sharpening of their roles and functions across all the regions, with many Theme Groups evolving from simple forums for information sharing into vehicles for mobilizing political commitment, or facilitating partnerships between national and international partners.

This report summarizes the main findings of a review of the status of UN Theme Groups conducted by the Secretariat's geographic divisions. As in previous years, the review focused on Theme Groups in countries for which the Secretariat has prioritized the allocation of its resources.


# II    SUMMARY

Given the different environments within which the UN system operates at country level, this review underlines, as previous assessments also did, that there are different modus operandi for UN Theme Groups.  What it also confirms is the welcome and continuing trend for more and more active expanded national forums or spaces around the theme of HIV/AIDS, thus enabling more effective and stronger national coordination.  80% of Theme Groups had convened expanded Theme Groups on HIV/AIDS with significant representation reported from Governments, International partners, bilateral agencies and national partners. This applies across all regions and is consistent with the recommendations from preceding PCB meetings for UN Theme Groups to promote and facilitate such expanded groups.  While the UN system continues to convene and facilitate many of these expanded forums or Theme Groups on HIV/AIDS, national authorities are increasingly assuming the responsibility for national coordination through the setting-up of AIDS Councils, authorities and such like.

Besides eliciting information on the modus operandi of Theme Groups, the review attempted to establish the extent to which the UN Theme Groups in particular and Theme Group mechanisms on HIV/AIDS in general are contributing to a stronger and more coordinated effort in support of national responses to HIV/AIDS.  In this regard, the review also focused on the status of development and implementation of UN integrated

workplans, on the scope of support by the UN system to the national response, including support to national strategic planning, and on resource mobilization through the integrated workplans.

The major focus remains the efficient coordination of the UN system support per se and emphasis has rightly been placed on the development and implementation of a UN system integrated plan on HIV/AIDS. Such a plan – especially if informed by a common UN system strategy – is the single most important indicator of an operational UNAIDS in country. Judging by the number of UN integrated workplans received or reported on, there has been good progress in this area. While in 1999 the United Nations System had formulated an integrated workplan on HIV/AIDS in 11 of the 86 countries (13%) reviewed, this review shows that in 2000, the United Nations system had developed an integrated planning process in 42 countries out of 76 (55%). However there is a clear need to assess the quality of these plans, the extent to which they reflect genuine collaboration among the UN system agencies, and, importantly, how they support and strengthen an effective national expanded response.

Mobilizing resources is also one of the more common strategic priorities of Theme Groups, and several Theme Groups have included that strategy as part of their integrated workplan. Indeed, the Secretariat's Programme Acceleration Funds (PAF) have provided the impetus to some Theme Groups to mobilize significant additional resources for in-country programmes. A systematic quantification of the level of such resources, however, remains a challenge, and this review is only a first attempt in this direction.

Such information, together with a better appreciation of how and to what extent Theme Groups are contributing to an effective national expanded response will need to be captured by in-depth appraisals and case studies. These appraisals and studies will be conducted by the Secretariat together with the Theme Groups in the coming months. They will in turn form the basis of the next assessment which will therefore provide a more comprehensive analysis of how UN Theme Groups are situated within the overall national response to HIV/AIDS and, importantly, how they can improve and strengthen their support.

## III    METHOD

Instruments used in the 2000 assessment consist of a questionnaire and a checklist. The questionnaire was developed by the UNAIDS Secretariat to assess the status of UN Theme Groups in countries for which the Secretariat has prioritised the allocation of its resources (Attachment 1, n=76). The geographic desk officers reviewed the original structure of the questionnaire.

The questionnaire was divided into three sections. The first section focused on the modus operandi of Theme Groups, including their membership, the membership of the technical working groups and the structure and role of expanded forums or Theme Group mechanisms on HIV/AIDS. The second section reviewed the status of UN integrated workplans, and, in particular, the extent to which they had been developed and reported to be implemented. It also examined the major constraints to the development of such

plans. The third section sought to determine the degree of effectiveness of Theme Groups in mobilizing resources, including through the integrated workplans.

The purpose of the checklist was to assess whether or not each plan included the following nine components: a strategic framework to guide United Nations HIV/AIDS-related action; objectives for United Nations agency action; activities; responsible agencies; a time frame for the implementation of activities; activity costs; source of funds; expected outputs; and indicators or milestones. The checklist encouraged an assessment of the extent to which the components were clearly defined as well as the internal consistency of the components. The checklist also focused on certain key activity areas, namely advocacy, resource mobilization and support to national strategic planning.

The questionnaires and checklists for integrated workplans were completed by the geographic desk officers during April and early May, in consultation in most cases with country programme advisers and UNAIDS focal points.


## IV    RESULTS

**Theme Group Modus Operandi**

This desk review underscores the range of modus operandi of Theme Groups. It confirms the feedback obtained by the Secretariat from the series of sub-regional consultations with UN Theme Groups, namely that the term "Theme Group on HIV/AIDS" encompasses in effect different Theme Group mechanisms.

Besides a core UN system Theme Group, there are, as recommended by the Programme Coordinating Board, a number of expanded Theme Groups or forums that bring together one or some of the following: government, national and international NGOs, networks of PLWHA, bilateral donor agencies, UNAIDS Cosponsors and other UN system agencies. These expanded forums or groups may be convened or facilitated by government or by the UN system. Of the 76 countries reviewed, 80% had an expanded Theme Group that was convened or facilitated by the UN system. However, 50% of countries also reported that the national authorities were now convening an expanded group on the theme of HIV/AIDS, confirming the growing and welcome trend towards national coordination of HIV/AIDS efforts by government bodies such as AIDS Councils or AIDS Authorities.

| Region | Expanded Theme Groups (%) |
|---|---|
| Sub-Saharan Africa | 90 |
| Asia/Pacific | 60 |
| Latin America/Caribbean | 77 |
| Eastern Europe | 76 |

Table 1: Expanded Theme Groups

Table 1 shows the percentage of countries by region that have an expanded Theme Group mechanism. There is now widespread agreement and understanding within the UN system and among other international partners that the ultimate objective is to strengthen the national capacity for coordination of external aid, and that this is an essential pre-requisite for country ownership. In the meantime, in many countries (76% of countries reviewed), the UN system continues to fulfil its honest broker role and is actively engaged in facilitating technical working groups. These expanded technical forums are in many instances the main meeting ground of all key actors on HIV/AIDS – national AIDS programmes, other government sectors, NGOs, bilateral aid agencies, as well as UN agencies – for policy and strategy development.

UN system activities, through Theme Group mechanisms that are best adapted to the local context, are focused on strengthening national coordination of HIV/AIDS activities, notably through facilitating information sharing between partners; promoting joint programming among the UN agencies and between the UN and others; and brokering partnerships with NGOs and other agencies and between Government, NGOs and Bilateral Agencies.

Table 2 shows that the Theme Groups are able to perform their key functions in a large number of countries across regions.

| Region | Facilitating Information % | Promoting Joint Programming % | Brokering Partnerships % |
|---|---|---|---|
| Sub-Saharan Africa | 86 | 63 | 89 |
| Asia Pacific | 100 | 63 | 81 |
| Latin America/Caribbean | 66 | 88 | 55 |
| Eastern Europe | 100 | 90 | 90 |

Table 2: Theme Groups strengthening of *national coordination* of HIV/AIDS

Although expanded Theme Groups on HIV/AIDS are highly desirable, with the UN system continuing to play an important and often leading role, a core UN Theme Group that brings together regularly the representatives of Cosponsors and other UN system agencies remains critical. To the extent that the UN system can demonstrate cohesion and coordination, it will have greater legitimacy and be better placed to support the push for national leadership and ownership.

In this context, the year 2000 review of the affiliation of Chairs of Theme Groups confirms the trend noted in the previous two years – that of greater ownership by the Cosponsors of the UN Theme Group. Thus, the great majority of Theme Groups, i.e. 74% are reported as having a regular rotation of the Chair. At the end of year 2000, the distribution of the chairmanship was as follows:

| UNAIDS Cosponsor | Percent distribution 1999 | Percent distribution 2000 |
|---|---|---|
| WHO | 34 | 31 |
| UNICEF | 24 | 21 |
| UNDP | 22 | 13 |
| UNFPA | 12 | 22 |
| UNESCO | 5 | 6 |
| UNDCP | 2 | 2 |
| World Bank | 1 | 5 |

Table 3  Agency affiliation of Chairs of UN Theme Groups on HIV/AIDS, 2000, across regions

**UN System Planning**

Theme Groups have continued to evolve, from forums for information sharing among the UN system agencies to effective spaces for joint planning and programming within the UN and among other partners in the national response. In this regard the review has also focused on the status of development of UN integrated workplans. They represent a key strategy of UN Theme Groups and provide an indication of their effective functioning.

The status of integrated workplans was highlighted in UNAIDS priority countries in 1998. 31% of the 97 countries reviewed reported an integrated workplan. However, these plans varied in scope and quality and were often a list of activities conducted separately by each agency. As a result, a checklist and guidelines were developed by the secretariat to assess the content of these plans. In the 1999 assessment, only 13% of priority countries qualified for an integrated workplan and a additional 48% has embarked on an integrated planning process.
In 2000, the guide "United Nations System Integrated Planning in support of the national response to HIV/AIDS" was largely promoted and distributed as well as examples of good practices.

The 2000 Theme Group assessment for priority countries shows progress with 55% of Theme Groups having completed integrated workplans as defined by the guidelines.

Table 4 shows the status of development of UN System Integrated Workplans for all countries. The review indicates that progress has been made in all regions and that, overall, UN Theme Groups have developed, or are well advanced in the process of developing integrated workplans in a majority of countries. Progress is particularly marked in Latin America and in Eastern Europe.

| Region | Number of countries | Percent with UN Integrated Workplans completed | Percent with UN Integrated Workplans in the process of development |
|---|---|---|---|
| Sub-Saharan Africa | 49 | 22 | 22 |
| Asia-Pacific | 14 | 43 | 28 |
| Latin America/Caribbean | 29 | 62 | 38 |
| Eastern Europe | 13 | 62 | 38 |

Table 4: UN System Integrated Workplans by Region for 2000[1]

However, it is as important to assess the process of integrated planning as it is to assess the workplan itself. The review provides some insight into the relative degree of participation and commitment to the process by the different Cosponsors. There was some geographical variation, reflecting in part the presence of the Cosponsors and in part the nature of the epidemic. In Latin America and the Caribbean region, WHO, UNICEF and UNFPA generally all played an active role, while UNDCP and the World Bank were less active. In the Sub-Saharan Africa region there was active participation by virtually all Cosponsors, with UNESCO being seen as the least active in the process overall. In the Asia/Pacific region WHO, UNICEF, UNFPA and UNDP in particular were all seen to play a major role in the workplanning process, while World Bank participation was relatively weak. The European region showed active participation by all Cosponsors. A major constraint in the process of development of the UN system Integrated Workplans for 2000, besides the lack of participation, was stated to be lack of guidance.

The value and relevance of a common UN system Integrated Workplan articulated around a sound situation and response analysis, and guided by shared priorities and a set of common strategic objectives, are applicable beyond the single issue of HIV/AIDS. In Asia/Pacific, Sub-Saharan Africa and Europe, UN system integrated workplanning on HIV/AIDS is increasingly linked and influenced by the broader UN Common Country Assessment and UN Development Assistance Framework (CCA/UNDAF) processes, for example in China and Nepal. In addition, the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers

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[1] Information for 2000 from countries in categories 1-3, as well as information received from CPAs and Geographic Desk Officers

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processes (PRSP) initiated by the World Bank are also informing or being informed by specific UN integrated planning on HIV/AIDS. This is the case for example in Kenya, Uganda and Mali.

## National strategic plans on HIV/AIDS

The Theme Groups also continue to be a major advocate for national strategic planning processes and to contribute funding and technical support in this important area.

In 1999, national strategic plans on HIV/AIDS had been formulated in 43% of countries and the planning process had been initiated in 36% countries. By 2000, national strategic plans on HIV/AIDS had been formulated in 78% of the countries responding.

Theme Group support to the processes of development of national strategic plans in 2000 was significant. The review showed that 65% of the Theme Groups had provided significant support to strategic planning processes and 30% had provided partial support (as defined on a 5 points scale).

## Resource Mobilization

The development and implementation of good UN integrated workplans should ensure that the UN system makes the best possible use of its resources. But they are also potentially useful instruments for leveraging additional resources by stimulating broader partnerships both within the UN system and beyond. A growing number of Theme Groups include mobilization of resources – both financial and technical – as a key element of their integrated workplans. However in only 45% of the countries with a UN integrated workplan was funding for the activities of the Theme Groups fully secured. This proportion was lowest in Asia/Pacific and Eastern Europe countries, around 38%, and highest in Sub-Saharan Africa, around 54%.

In 2000 compared with 1999, across all regions, 70% of the countries reported a significant increase in support by UN Agencies, in terms of human and financial resources for HIV/AIDS activities. This was particularly marked in Sub-Saharan African countries where 88% are reported as having significantly increased their support, and less so in Latin American and Caribbean countries (42%).

Furthermore, in 71% of countries of the Asia Pacific region, UN Theme Groups are reported to have facilitated the mobilization of additional significant resources for the 2000 national response. These additional resources came mainly from government and donor agencies. In Latin American and Caribbean countries, 57% of UN Theme Groups are reported to have mobilized additional resources. In the Sub-Saharan African region, 69% of UN Theme Groups were able to mobilize resources mainly from private and international foundations. And in Eastern Europe all UN Theme Groups are reported to have contributed significantly to resource mobilization, particularly from the government and NGO sectors.

**Programme Acceleration Funds**

The process of mobilizing financial and technical resources in support of national responses through the Theme Groups is being further facilitated by the Secretariat through the Programme Acceleration Funds. These funds are channelled through and managed by the Theme Groups, with the dual aim of consolidating a more coordinated and strategic UN response and of promoting an expanded response through broader partnerships.

To mid-April this year, over 270 proposals had been submitted by UN Theme Groups for PAF funding and proposals amounting to over US$17.5 million had been approved, of which US$ 7.7 million or 44 % are for activities that are part of UN integrated workplans. A further US $ 3.1 million or 18% of the approved PAF are in support of strategic planning activities, including support for national, sectoral or district planning as well as support for UN integrated workplanning processes.

| Table 5 : PAF allocation to end April 2001 in US $ | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Broad categories** | **Africa** | **Asia/ Pacific** | **Latin America/ Caribbean** | **Eastern Europe** | **Total US $** | **%** |
| UN integrated workplan activities | 3,998,940 | 714,110 | 1,516,420 | 1,469,000 | 7,698,478 | 44% |
| strategic planning activities  (i) | 2,235,402 | 351,000 | 300,000 | 247,500 | 3,133,900 | 18% |
| other activities  (ii) | 3,984,850 | 2,035,950 | 620,000 | 115,000 | 6,755,800 | 38% |
| Total | 10,219,192 | 3,101,060 | 2,436,420 | 1,831,500 | 17,588,180 | |
| % of overall allocation | 58,1% | 17,6% | 13,9% | 10,4% | | |

*i)  these include the following: support for national and sub-national planning, sectoral and district planning, and support for UN integrated workplanning processes.*
*ii) all activities that are not part of a UN integrated workplan*

The PAF are undoubtedly stimulating greater and stronger coordination among Theme Group members, with all Cosponsors sharing responsibility for execution of projects, albeit in varying degrees. Thus far the UN executing agency for almost 50% of the projects is UNDP, WHO in 21% of cases, UNICEF in 13 %, UNFPA in just under 8%, UNESCO in 6,5% and UNDCP in 1,7%.

However, the extent to which the PAF are enabling Theme Groups to mobilize or leverage additional financial and technical resources in support of national responses is more difficult to gauge and, as is the case with the quality of integrated workplans, it will necessitate a more in-depth analysis in the coming months.

There are already some outstanding examples of the potential of PAF and the Theme Groups to leverage significant resources, not least Nepal where a US $200,000 PAF grant

has allowed the Theme Group to attract an amount in excess of US $ 3 million to be utilized for a major effort at scaling up the response among vulnerable populations; or in Africa, where additional resources totalling over $ 5 million will be channelled as part of the International Partnership against AIDS through the UN Theme Groups; or again in the Caribbean where the Netherlands will be committing an additional $1.6 million and the World Bank has announced a credit line of $100 million for HIV/AIDS.


## V    CONCLUSION

This review confirms the diversity of modus operandi of Theme Groups, which in turn tend to reflect the different situations prevailing in countries, notably concerning the strength of government coordinating bodies or institutions, the status of the national response in general (including the involvement of civil society), and the status of the UN system and of international aid agencies.

The review provides useful insight into the functioning of Theme Groups on HIV/AIDS and a fairly objective appraisal of their contribution to the improved coordination of support to the national response.  It confirms that Theme Groups have continued to make progress in key areas, including in the development of integrated workplans.  On the other hand, the assessment provided only limited insight into the important processes of integrated workplanning.  It does not allow a valid assessment of the quality of these workplans in terms of the degree of integration and the soundness of their strategic orientation, including the linkages where appropriate to national strategic plans and nationally defined priorities in general.

The review reflects well the increased diversity of UN Theme Groups on HIV/AIDS, and has highlighted the difficulties of generating valid information on Theme Group operations simply from a questionnaire and a desk review.  For instance, the review does not allow any genuine comparative appraisal of the effectiveness and efficiency of Theme Groups and, in particular, the extent to which they contribute to achieving tangible results in support of stronger national responses and to meeting defined targets.  Such an appraisal will necessitate an in-depth assessment of the workings and objectives of selected Theme Groups and will usefully complement the annual desk reviews.

At the same time, these in-depth assessments, which should be carried out in collaboration with the Cosponsors and Theme Groups, should provide an opportunity to enhance the functioning of Theme Groups in general by drawing out lessons and principles of good practice and by sharing these with the Theme Groups.

The Secretariat will therefore  embark in the coming months on a comprehensive review of selected Theme Groups that reflect different contexts and situations, in order to assess their roles and functions and, in particular, the ways in which they are contributing to countries' AIDS efforts.  The in-depth review will be conducted by the Secretariat's Evaluation Unit in collaboration with the newly-established Theme Group Support Unit. This new unit is intended to facilitate better functioning of all Theme Groups and, among

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others, will monitor the development and implementation of unified workplans of the UN system in countries and promote better integration of Theme Groups into the UN Resident Coordinator system.

The in-depth assessment of the Theme Groups will build on the experience gained in developing and implementing the AIDS Programme Effort Index (API), which is an example of a systematic attempt to measure national and international programme effort in response to the HIV/AIDS epidemic. The API was applied in forty countries in 2000 and a summary of the findings of these assessments is included as Annex 1 to this report.

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## Attachment 1.  Categories 1 and 2 for National Allocation of UNAIDS

## Resources to Countries

| Region | Category 1 | Category 2 |
|---|---|---|
| **Sub-Saharan Africa** | Botswana | Angola |
| | Burkina Faso | Benin |
| | Congo (Kin) | Burundi |
| | Côte d'Ivoire | Cameroon |
| | Ethiopia | CAR |
| | Ghana | Chad |
| | Kenya | Congo (Brazz) |
| | Malawi | Djibouti |
| | Mozambique | Eritrea |
| | Namibia | Gambia |
| | Nigeria | Guinea |
| | Rwanda | Lesotho |
| | South Africa | Liberia |
| | Uganda | Madagascar |
| | UR Tanzania | Mali |
| | Zambia | Niger |
| | Zimbabwe | Senegal |
| | | Sierra Leone |
| | | Sudan |
| | | Swaziland |
| | | Togo |
| | | |
| **Asia/Pacific** | Cambodia | Bangladesh |
| | China | Indonesia |
| | India | Laos |
| | Myanmar | Malaysia |
| | Vietnam | Mongolia |
| | | Nepal |
| | | Pakistan |
| | | Philippines |
| | | PNG |
| | | Sri Lanka |
| | | Thailand |
| | | |

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| Region | Category 1 | Category 2 |
|---|---|---|
| **Latin America/Caribbean** | Brazil | Argentina |
| | Dominican Republic | Chile |
| | Guyana | Colombia |
| | Honduras | Cuba |
| | Mexico | Guatemala |
| | Haiti | Peru |
| | | Uruguay |
| | | Venezuela |
| | | El Salvador |
| | | Bahamas |
| | | Barbados |
| | | Belize |
| | | Jamaica |
| | | Suriname |
| | | Trinidad & Tobago |
| | | |
| **Eastern Europe** | Belarus | Armenia |
| | Kazakhstan | Bulgaria |
| | Russian Federation | Georgia |
| | Ukraine | Kyrgystan |
| | | Lithuania |
| | | Rep. Moldova |
| | | Romania |
| | | Turkmenistan |
| | | Uzbekistan |